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ABSTRACT

The psychological testing of blacks and other minorities inflicts dehumanization upon them by subjecting them to culturally-biased examinations. These tests are defended on "scientific" grounds, although it is evident that they are simply a form of institutionalized racism. Standardized tests of intelligence reflect a middle-class white bias that makes little allowance for minority participation in the development of these tests. The most deleterious effect of these tests is to place minority children in special slow-learner classes where they develop a low self-esteem. The classifying of students according to their performance in these tests greatly limits the range of educational opportunities available to them. These tests, because of their inherent bias, must be dropped as a tool for measuring intelligence. (WP)

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PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING OF BLACK PEOPLE

A POSITION PAPER

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BLACK PSYCHOLOGISTS
COMMITTEE ON PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING

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The present controversy surrounding the use of psychological tests on Black and other minority people has reached crisis proportions. The issue is more than a mere revival of the old nature vs. nuture or heredity vs. environment controversy which was waged in the past. Today's controversy involves moral, ethical, and eugenic issues which have serious economical, political and social policy implications. Thus, there is little wonder why discussions of the controversy have gone beyond the confines of professional psychological journals and are being aired daily in local newspapers and in some of the major popular magazines, including Time, Saturday Review, and the Atlantic Monthly to name a few. The battleground for this controversy has moved from the cloistered sanctity of the academic institutions and laboratories into the public arena, the community and on into the legal arena--the courts.

The moral issues need little discussion. It is morally wrong for Black and other minority children and adults to continue to experience the psychological abuse and dehumanization inflicted via the administration of culturally biased IQ tests. Simply stated then, the moral issue is whether the professional psychological community is willing to allow Blacks and other minority people to continue to suffer the ill effects of institutionalized racism and the cruel injustices of discrimination based on psychological information that is highly questionable and inconclusive. Both testing and research are carried out under the guise of a quest for scientific knowledge.

This type of "scientific" ideology governed the Tuskegee syphilis study in which 400 Black Alabama men were subjected to savage and inhumane treatment in search of knowledge.

The ethical issue involved is whether the professional psychological community is willing to continue to defend and condone certain psychological practices which result directly or indirectly in irreparable damage to Black and other minority people. The manifest indifference coupled with the nervous and sometimes surprising defensiveness on the part of many psychologists are suggestive of bad omens.

Even more important than the moral and ethical issues are the eugenic implications of psychological testing. On June 14, 1973 a white Alabama doctor performed tubal ligation which sterilized two Black girls, Minnie and Mary Alice Relf, ages 14 and 12. Mary Alice has been diagnosed as mentally retarded; Minnie was in a class for slow learners, but recently was transferred to regular public school classes. In the light of these two cases of "eugenic sterilization" and numerous others, the question of IQ testing becomes quite serious. One of the major research conclusions in the psychological literature is that the rate of mental retardation is about seven times higher among Blacks than whites. These findings relate very closely to the claim by some of a "dysgenic trend" in the Black population or the belief that low IQ mothers produce low IQ children. The dysgenic threat, then, is an accumulation of bad or undesirable genes in a population. In this case, the bad genes are associated with low intelligence. A dysgenic effect means that the offspring are helplessly weak and unfit and should not be allowed to reproduce children.

Over half of the states still have sterilization laws. Sterilization

today is used as a means to reduce the number of welfare recipients by making it a condition for receiving welfare payment, a requirement for parole, and for those classified as mentally retarded and socially inadequate. In fact, a recent investigation of hospital records in Aiken, South Carolina revealed that over a third of the welfare mothers who have had babies and Medi-care expense in the county hospital have been sterilized according to the article in the July 22, 1973 Washington Post. Sterilization is the apparent policy of the county's three obstetricians who told the welfare mothers that they would have to agree to sterilization before the doctors would deliver their babies. The policy was limited to welfare mothers who already had three or more children. The records show that 18 welfare mothers had been sterilized during the first six months of the year. Of these 17 were Black and 10 were under 25 years of age. Two of the sterilizations were performed for medical reasons, but the rest were termed "elective." One of the doctors was quoted as telling two South Carolina newspapers, "I feel that if I'm paying for them as a taxpayer, I want to put an end to their reproduction."

It has been found recently that three out of four Black law school graduates failed to pass bar examinations allowing them to practice. The National Bar Association and the ACLU filed suits stating that bar exams discriminate against Blacks. A Georgia suit was filed for 15 Black law school graduates charging that the state exam is prepared and administered in a racially discriminatory manner and that the grading is often a matter of the examiner's judgement rather than a tabulation of the technically right or wrong answers. The suit asked that all Black law school graduates who have been excluded from the bar on the basis of

the test be allowed to practice in the state. Many of the plantiffs are graduates of the best law schools. Georgia, for example, has 4,111 attorneys; only 54 are Black. Last July, 542 persons took the Georgia Bar exam. All the Black applicants, about 50 of them, were failed. About 300 whites were passed.

It must be made abundantly clear that the following discussion and the position presented will focus on the issues involved and the problems resulting from the application of standard psychological tests in the evaluation of Black people. This should not be construed as a lack of recognition of the fact that there are similar issues and problems resulting from the application of these tests in the evaluation of other minority groups and all so-called disadvantaged people. For obvious reasons, I. as a Black and as a representative of the National Association of Black Psychologists do not intend to engage in the paternalistic practice of voicing the concerns of other groups without sanction.

When one looks at the issues involved there is little basis for calling the argument a controversy It is truly a crisis. The central issue has been stated repeatedly that the psychological tests presently being used to assess the functioning of Blacks are biased and inappropriate for that purpose. I am referring specifically to the standardized group and individual tests of intelligence, group tests of academic achievement, general aptitude, and tests which profess to measure general ability commonly used in employment screening and admissions to institutions of higher education.

All such tests are constructed and standardized in basically the

same fashion following the established procedures which according to one reviewer (Green, 1972) have remained essentially unchanged over many years. In a recent report on the Racial and Ethnic Bias in Test Construction, (Green, 1972) points out that the bias in test construction is not only a result of the makeup of the standardization sample, which in all instances is predominantly if not totally white middle class, but is a direct result of the composition of the tryout samples whose responses determine the items to be selected for a given test. He concluded that, "Just as the degree of minority representation in standardization samples can have only a small influence on norms, minority group presence in tryout samples dominated by some solid majority will not accomplish much." He further concludes, "...it is no longer adequate for those who build tests to argue that bias is largely a matter of test misuse..." (p. 14).

Psychologists have never been able to reach agreement on a standard definition of intelligence. Until very recently the most widely taught, the most commonly held definitions of intelligence included the ability to learn, the amount of information held, the capacity to adapt to new situations, and the ability to cope effectively with one's environment. The authors of the two most widely used intelligence tests, the Standard-Binet and the Wechsler, emphasized in their definitions the adaptive aspects of intelligence." (Robinson and Robinson, 1965, p. 7).

In a report to the American Psychological Association prepared by an Ad Hoc Committee on the Educational Use of Tests with the Disadvantaged (Cleary et al, 1972), one of the latest of the revised definitions of intelligence is proposed. The report states, "Intelligence is defined as

the totality of responses at any one period of time appropriate to the solution of intellectual problems." It goes on to state, "intellectual is defined by a consensus among psychologists." (p. 10).

Interestingly enough this committee, composed of experts in the field of psychological measurement, rejected the adaptive aspect of intelligence, which was so crucial a factor for so many years. They rejected adaptation to one's environment as a key factor because it was, "...so broad as to be virtually meaningless." (p.24). Yet they propose a circular definition which admittedly requires consensus -- as a more precise, quantifiable substitute.

While the advocates of testing are marshalling forces and preparing counter arguments to retain practices which raise questions of professional ethics as well as morality, Black, Chicano, and other third world children are still being victimized. A change in definition does not make available educational opportunities which labeling and tracking automatically deny. The damage resulting from the use of culturally biased IQ tests affect more than the child's immediate academic situation. Evidence indicates that knowledge of a child's intellectual potential can influence the expectancies of teachers, which in turn influences the performance of the child (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968; Rosenthal, 1973). Expectations of parents, family and the community are also influenced by information from recognized authorities that a child's intellectual ability is limited. The educational programs into which these inappropriately labelled students are then channelled provide limited stimulation and opportunity to prepare them for a full range of academic or occupational careers. Thus, opportunities for jobs and economic

security are also greatly diminished. In other words, there is a clear ripple effect of the damage that improper labeling and tracking can have. There is the immediate and lasting damage inflicted on the child in terms of his self image and his future development. The family and the community suffer by being deprived of a potentially productive contributor.

That existing IQ tests are biased against Blacks should be a widely accepted fact in the psychological community by this time. In a statement endorsed by 18 members of the Governing Council of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI) it was clearly stated: "We must also recognize the limitations of present-day intelligence tests. Largely developed and standardized on white middle-class children, these tests tend to be biased against Black children to an unknown degree." (Albee et al., 1969).

Based on results of an exhaustive eight year study, Mercer (1971) concluded, "...the IQ tests now being used by psychologists are, to a large extent Anglocentric. They tend to measure the extent to which an individual's background is similar to that of the cultural configuration of Anglo, middle-class society, and are not valid, as normed for Mexican-Americans and Black populations."

Pierce, West, Dent, Rawls and Woodson (1970) cited a clear demonstration of how biased IQ tests operate systematically to the disadvantage of Black children. In a report to the San Francisco Board of Education, they reviewed the racial distribution of students in special education classes for the educably mentally retarded (EMR). Their evidence showed that 60% of the

students in EMR classes were Black, where Blacks constituted only 28.5 of the total student population in the district. At the same time, whites comprised only 20.3% of the students in EMR classes when they constituted almost 40% of the district population. This racial imbalance of students in special education classes exists throughout the State of California and across the country as well. Although Blacks comprise only 9% of the total student population in California, they comprise 27% of the students in EMR classes.

Mercer's (1971) data provide additional support for these alarming statistics. She reported that 75% of the children in EMR classes would not be diagnosed retarded if appropriate assessment measures which take into account socio-cultural background had been used. Careful re-evaluation of Black children in EMR programs in Washington, D.C. revealed that 66% were inappropriately placed. Similarly, re-evaluation of students in Philadelphia schools found that 25% were definitely misplaced in EMR classes and 43% of the EMR placements were questionable (Pines, 1970). In the Tucson public schools, it was found that almost 75% of the Chicano children in EMR classes were inappropriately placed. The consistent pattern of mis-labelling two/thirds of the Black and Chicano students in classes for the educable mentally retarded is a serious issue in minority communities.

The improper placement of children in EMR classes is but one way in which IQ tests are used to victimize Black children and deprive them of educational opportunities. Bright Black children are being systematically excluded from programs for the educationally gifted (High Potential). The California Education Code requires that a child obtain a score which places

him above the 97th percentile on a standard IQ test. Black children comprise less than 2% of the students in the High Potential program throughout the state, in spite of the fact that 9.1% of the school children in the state are Black.

It is clear that many in the psychological community and the test-making industry are at a loss to defend against the direct charge made by Black psychologists, and others, that existing tests of intelligence are biased against Black people and others whose experiences do not approximate the experiences of the modal population of this society, namely white middle income America. Although the psychological community has not accepted this evidence, it has been accepted by the Board of Education of some major school districts in the nation, by local judges and by the U. S. Supreme Court. New York City and Washington, D. C. have eliminated the use of group scholastic aptitude (Q) tests, and Los Angeles, St. Paul and Philadelphia have placed strict limitations on their use (Pines, 1970). Judge Robert F. Peckham (1972) in his order issuing a preliminary injunction against the San Francisco Unified School District banning the use of IQ tests (group and individual) on Black children which results in disproportionate representation of Black children in classes for the educable mentally retarded, cited six legal decisions which were rendered in favor of plaintiffs who were discriminated against as a result of reliance on information gained through the use of IQ tests.

The U. S. Supreme Court (March, 1971) issued an order which in essence says that under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 it is unlawful

to engage in, "...practices, procedures or tests neutral on their face, and even neutral in terms of intent...if they operate to 'freeze' the statu- quo of prior discriminatroy...practices." (Briggs vs. Duke Power Co.). While that decision was rendered in relation to employment practices, the discriminatory effects of the use of IQ tests is well established (Peckam, 1972) and therefore the intent of the decision is applicable in principle.

The advocates for retaining the use of standard IQ tests in educational practice maintain that IQ tests are valid predicators of future academic success. They fail to report that the highest degree of accuracy of those predictions are for that group which clusters around the midpoint of scores on the test, whatever test is used. And that accuracy decreases significantly as the scores move away from that modal point on the distribution of scores. That is to say, the closer one scores to the mean of the normative distribution, the more accurate is the predictive value of that score, all other factors being equal. The reality is that all other factors, e. g. availability of educational opportunities, are not only equal, they are highly dependent upon the results of one's performance on an IQ test. In other words, the labeling, classifying and teaching of students as a result of their performance on IQ tests (and achievement tests) greatly influences the educational opportunities available to Black children and, therefore, directly affects their future academic performance. The advocates of continued use of existing IQ tests cite this as a grave misuse of tests and lay the blame at the doorstep of the educational institutions, but fail to recognize that it is the inherent bias of the instruments which is equally,

if not more, at fault than educational institutions. For the fact of the matter is that the educational institutions rely blindly on the expertice of the psychological community.

In spite of all efforts, some psychologists refuse to accept the realities that there are real differences in the environmental conditions under which Blacks and other minority groups are forced to live in this country. Institutional racism sets up a distinct set of conditions, however subtle or however blatant, which influences the lives of every one in this society regardless of socio-economic status. Then too there are also real cultural differences which ethnic groups choose to retain that markedly influence life styles, attitudes and approaches to learning, the way people acquire information, what information is retained, and the ways in which people cope with and adapt to their environment.

But tests are developed and used as though all people had the same environmental experiences and were exposed to identical historical and cultural influences, when they live in suburbia, a ghetto, a barrio, on a reservation, in a penthouse or in a basement.

In light of the growing body of evidence, some of which has been discussed in this paper, which clearly indicates that existing group and individual tests of intelligence, group tests of scholastic ability, and group tests of general aptitudes, systematically underestimate the intellectual and academic functioning and achievements of Black people, the National Association of Black Psychologists proposes the following position:

1. Association of Black Psychologists will encourage and support efforts at the local, state, and national level to bring action against educational institutions, industrial organizations and governmental agencies to enjoin them from continuing to use presently existing standard psychometric instruments in the psychological assessment of Black people in this country.
2. Association of Black Psychologists will continue its efforts to bring about a cessation of the use of standard psychometric instruments on Black people until such time as culturally relevant and culturally specific tests are developed and made available.
3. Association of Black Psychologists will establish a national policy that in such cases where a Black person or the parents of a Black minor feels it would be in his or her best interest (or the best interest of the minor) to be evaluated by a psychologist, it is their right to demand that the psychological assessment be administered, interpreted and/or supervised by a person of their own ethnic background who is competent in psychological assessment.
4. Association of Black Psychologists will work and encourage efforts to have removed from the cumulative records of all Black students attending public schools, the personnel records of all Black employees in industrial organizations, the personnel files of all Black employees in local, state and national agencies all quantitative and qualitative data obtained from performance on past and presently used standard psychometric, educational achievement, employment, general aptitude and mental ability tests.

5. Association of Black Psychologists will work to establish a national policy that all local, state, and national committees, governmental or professional, responsible for the evaluation and selection of tests to be used in the assessment of Black people shall have appropriate proportional representation of Black psychologists who have expertise in test development and test utilization.

6. Association of Black Psychologists will establish a national policy that will require all persons engaged in the evaluation, selection and placement of Black students and prospective Black employees to undergo extensive pre-service and inservice training designed to prepare such people to be able to "dig" and relate to the Black experience.

7. Association of Black Psychologists takes the unequivocable position that all Black students improperly diagnosed (as educationally mentally retarded, educationally handicapped, etc.) so as to remove them from regular classes must be removed from special education classes and returned to regular class programs.

8. And, that all such children making the transition from special education classes to regular classes be provided in those regular classes with as much tutorial help (such as diagnostic prescriptive teaching) to supplement the regular program offerings as needed tp enable those students to overcome the deficits which undoubtedly result from having spent any time in classes where educational opportunities are less than those available in the regular programs.

9. Association of Black Psychologists will encourage and support individual and class action suits against local, state and national public and private agencies for the exclusion of Black people, the improper classification of Black people and the denial of advancement opportunities to Black people based on the results of civil service examinations, other employment screening and assessment instruments.